

“When It Comes To Training - Size Doesn't Matter”

From Fresh Milk from Contented Cows

By Richard Hadden

July 2006

On May 6, 2006, 5-foot-4 Officer Julie Welch, of the Holly Springs, Georgia police force, stopped a driver for failure of the driver and her passenger to wear their seatbelts. When the 6-foot-11 passenger got out of the car, it became apparent to Officer Welch, and to the dashboard video camera trained on the scene, that this would be no ordinary traffic stop.

The passenger's behavior gave the officer subtle clues that he might have something to hide. Like a container of a mind-altering white powder he had stuffed into his pocket before he emerged (and emerged, and emerged) from the vehicle.

While Officer Welch tried to fit the suspect with a pair of handcuffs, he wriggled away, knocking both of them to the ground. Then he got up, and, unfortunately for him, ran into a nearby briar patch.

He was barefooted.

A bystander, Steve Walker, observed the struggle and flight, and ran to the officer's assistance. The two of them apprehended the suspect, and he was charged with various offences that we'll just say won't look good during his next job interview.

A few weeks later, the story (leading with the height differential hook), and Officer Welch, were featured on NBC's Today Show. The obvious line of questioning centered around what enabled Julie Welch to perform successfully in this situation. Specifically, how did she know to stop this particular seatbelt offender, to ask him to get out of the car, and how did she manage against a man nineteen inches taller than she?

"The training kicked in," was her first reply. Anchors Matt Lauer and Ann Curry seemed to want something juicier than that for their early morning audience, and so they pressed the point. Welch kept saying, "Training." She even apologized for not having a sexier answer.

It would hardly be a revelation to assert here that training helps people do their jobs better. Good training, well-applied, appropriately focused, that is. And if the interview had stopped there, we would hardly have noticed.

But then, Ann Curry asked a question that caught our attention. "What made you *not hold back*?"

"We have an excellent training division," said Officer Welch, who handled the interview better than, say, the average media-coached U.S. Senator subjected to similar grilling. "Our training officer brings us the best training she can find."

Thank you, Officer Welch, for helping us make a point. It's not just that people who are better trained know better how to do the job. That's a big duh. The point is that professionals, who are **confident** in their **competence**, are able to let forth with a boundless supply of energy, attention, and focus.

Conversely, people who doubt their own ability to do a job particularly well can't help but, as Ann Curry put it, hold back.

We also talked to Officer Welch, unconstrained by a producer with a three minute limit to a morning news segment. She articulated for us some great lessons about the contribution of training to "not holding back."

"We're trained to recognize clues without consciously thinking about it," Officer Welch told us. The avoidance of eye-contact, and the heavily pulsating carotid artery on the man's neck suggested to Officer Welch that the seatbelt thing might have been the least of his infractions.

"Either that's from training," Welch told us, "or the fact that I'm a mom."

"Our training also makes it easier for us to act with confidence, because we know what we can and cannot do with a suspect." She knew that she would be well within her rights to conduct a "Terry frisk" on the suspect (named, as she told us, for the 1963 Supreme Court case *Terry vs. Ohio*), in order to protect herself should the suspect be carrying a weapon. Had she not done the Terry frisk, she would have missed the three cocaine pipes in his pocket.

And Officer Welch reminded us of something else about training.

When it comes to training, the size of your organization doesn't matter. "We're a small police force," said Welch, "but we're part of a larger county, Cherokee County [northeast of Atlanta]. We participate in multi-agency training with the other municipalities in our county, and that allows us to have access to training just as good as any large local government."

Some of the best-trained professionals in any field work for small organizations that take advantage of creative opportunities to train their people. If yours is not a mega-corporation with lots of training bucks (or even if it is), here are a few good places you might look to help train and educate your workforce.